

RITUAL

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4. SOLEMNIZATIONS

We now turn to ceremonials which do not stand on their own, as so many efforts to wield supernatural power for particular ends, but which surround or merge with certain critical mundane events, birth, death, and marriage. For the Nupe, these ceremonials do not represent *kuti*, rituals proper: they do not move the force that is in the universe; nor do they belong to the tools which God granted man for this purpose. The ceremonials of birth, death, or marriage are merely observances, customary ways of dealing with the events in question or, as the Nupe say, 'ways of doing things'. If we call them 'rituals' or 'rites', we are applying our own nomenclature for such procedures. Even so, these 'ways of doing things' involve appeals to God and some link with the whole system of religious ideas; that is, they are *solemnizations* of mundane acts. 796^x

(i) *Birth*

The observances bearing on childbirth begin already with conception and culminate, some time after the actual birth, in the naming ceremonial, so that the event of birth is treated, not as a climax, but as one in a series of events or stages. This concern with pre- and post-natal phases corresponds closely to the Nupe conceptions of life and of body and soul; several of the respective observances, however, are neither specifically 'religious' nor explicitly fitted into the 'natural philosophy' of the people, belonging rather to the more indefinite range of notions we commonly call superstitions. 842

Thus the most auspicious time for conception is laid down, in typical Nupe manner, by numbering the day in question, which should be the fifth after the mother's menses. The night should be young, for a child conceived in the dark of the night, when spirits and witches are abroad, might easily be born misshapen. As soon as the pregnancy is noticeable (in the third month, as the Nupe calculate, or at the latest in the fifth), the parents must discontinue sexual relations; the mother must avoid places inhabited by spirits as well as certain kinds of food which might harm the child: honey would give it adenoids, and a certain fish cause it to have six fingers on one hand. I have already mentioned that the avoidance of cohabitation continues for about three years after the birth of the child, since a new conception and pregnancy might stop the growth of the infant. In addition to these general rules and avoidances, which everyone knows, there may be special ones, ordered by the diviner, whom the expectant father will at once consult. 777
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